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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5454
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 0105
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3698
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

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SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN; DRL

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: STILL NO PRISON ACCESS FOR ICRC

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) ICRC's Deputy Head of Delegation for Central Asia, Raffaello Muller paid a courtesy call on the Charge on July 16 and said that although his organization still has no access to prisons in Turkmenistan, they are encouraged by the fact that the Turkmen government has not definitively rejected the possibility. Tashkent-based Muller (ICRC has no regular presence in Turkmenistan) was in Ashgabat for an ICRC training seminar on prisoners' rights and prison conditions under international humanitarian law. ICRC continues to negotiate with the authorities for access to prisoners in Turkmenistan. He noted that the Turkmen frequently send participants who are not "of the appropriate" level to ICRC's events.

¶2. (C) Referring to his recent discussions on the subject of prisoner access with Turkmenistan's Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, Muller noted (with obvious frustration) that "continuing to negotiate just for the sake of negotiating does not make sense." He said that the Institute's director, Shirin Ahmedova, has told him, "We are not against your monitoring prisons, but you have to understand us."

SUPPORT FOR LEGAL REFORMS

¶3. (C) Muller said that in all of his discussions with the Turkmen on the issue of prison access, he emphasizes that opening up the prisons to ICRC will help them improve the penitentiary system as a whole. ICRC appreciates U.S. political support and sees such support as crucial. He noted that although ICRC is a non-political, humanitarian organization, the issue of prison access is automatically a political one, and reiterated that such support is vital for them. Kyrgyzstan is still the only Central Asian country that allows ICRC to visit detainees, he said. The NGO Medecins San Frontieres, the only international NGO operating in Turkmenistan, has proposed a project to the authorities under which it would provide health care to prisoners. Muller called the health situation in Turkmenistan's prisons "catastrophic."

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Although clearly frustrated, after four years of effort, at the Turkmen government's intransigence on the issue of prisoner access, Muller has not given up hope. He

continues to be encouraged simply by the fact that the
Turkmen have not said "no" altogether. END COMMENT.
MILES